

# U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE SPECIES ASSESSMENT AND LISTING PRIORITY ASSIGNMENT FORM

**Scientific Name:**

Cirsium wrightii

**Common Name:**

Wright's Marsh thistle

**Lead region:**

Region 2 (Southwest Region)

**Information current as of:**

03/10/2015

**Status/Action**

☐ Funding provided for a proposed rule. Assessment not updated.

☐ Species Assessment - determined species did not meet the definition of the endangered or threatened under the Act and, therefore, was not elevated to the Candidate status.

☐ New Candidate

☒ Continuing Candidate

☐ Candidate Removal

☐ Taxon is more abundant or widespread than previously believed or not subject to the degree of threats sufficient to warrant issuance of a proposed listing or continuance of candidate status

☐ Taxon not subject to the degree of threats sufficient to warrant issuance of a proposed listing or continuance of candidate status due, in part or totally, to conservation efforts that remove or reduce the threats to the species

☐ Range is no longer a U.S. territory

☐ Insufficient information exists on biological vulnerability and threats to support listing

- ☐ Taxon mistakenly included in past notice of review
- ☐ Taxon does not meet the definition of "species"
- ☐ Taxon believed to be extinct
- ☐ Conservation efforts have removed or reduced threats
- ☐ More abundant than believed, diminished threats, or threats eliminated.

## Petition Information

☐ Non-Petitioned

☒ Petitioned - Date petition received: 10/15/2008

90-Day Positive: 09/10/2009

12 Month Positive: 11/04/2010

Did the Petition request a reclassification? **No**

### For Petitioned Candidate species:

Is the listing warranted (if yes, see summary threats below) **Yes**

To Date, has publication of the proposal to list been precluded by other higher priority listing? **Yes**

Explanation of why precluded:

We find that the immediate issuance of a proposed rule and timely promulgation of a final rule for this species has been, for the preceding 12 months, and continues to be, precluded by higher priority listing actions (including candidate species with lower LPNs). During the past 12 months, the majority of our entire national listing budget has been consumed by work on various listing actions to comply with court orders and court-approved settlement agreements; meeting statutory deadlines for petition findings or listing determinations; emergency listing evaluations and determinations; and essential litigation-related administrative and program management tasks. We will continue to monitor the status of this species as new information becomes available. This review will determine if a change in status is warranted, including the need to make prompt use of emergency listing procedures. For information on listing actions taken over the past 12 months, see the discussion of Progress on Revising the Lists, in the current CNOR which can be viewed on our Internet website (<http://endangered.fws.gov/>).

## Historical States/Territories/Countries of Occurrence:

- **States/US Territories:** Arizona, New Mexico
- **US Counties:** County information not available
- **Countries:** Mexico

## Current States/Counties/Territories/Countries of Occurrence:

- **States/US Territories:** Arizona, New Mexico
- **US Counties:** Cochise, AZ, Chaves, NM, Eddy, NM, Guadalupe, NM, Otero, NM, Socorro, NM
- **Countries:** Mexico

## Land Ownership:

In the Sacramento Mountains, two of the six localities occur on the Lincoln National Forest, three localities are on private land and the remaining locality is on the Mescalero Apache Reservation. In the Pecos River Valley, one locality is on public lands on the Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge (BLNWR), Chaves County; one is on private land near the Black River, Eddy County; one is in the vicinity of Santa Rosa, Guadalupe County, on private, municipal, and State lands; and one is in Grant County, where rosettes were experimentally planted on private land in 2011. The remaining locality is on private land on Alamosa Creek, Socorro County. Localities vary in population size from 2 mature individuals covering only about 54 square feet (ft<sup>2</sup>) (5 square meters (m<sup>2</sup>)) at the Haynes Canyon locality, to 18,00 individuals on BLNWR (Sivinski 2012, entire).

## Lead Region Contact:

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## Lead Field Office Contact:

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## Biological Information

### Species Description:

Wright's marsh thistle (*Cirsium wrightii*; for the purposes of this document, we will refer to *Cirsium wrightii* as Wright's marsh thistle) is a biennial (a plant completing development in 2 years, and producing flowers in its second year) or a weak monocarpic perennial (a plant that flowers, sets seed, then dies), in the sunflower family (Asteraceae). The plant is prickly with short black spines and a 3- to 8-foot (ft) (0.9- to 2.4-meter (m)) single stalk covered with succulent leaves (Sivinski 1996, p. 1; Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) 2001, p. 1). Numerous slender flowering branches emerge from the stalk, starting about one-third up the length of the plant stalk. The ends

of the branches support one or a few small flowering heads, which have numerous slender phyllaries (a modified leaf associated with the flower) (Sivinski 1996, p. 1). Flowers are white to pale pink in areas of the Sacramento Mountains, but are vivid pink in all the Pecos Valley locations (Sivinski 1996, p. 1). In New Mexico, the species occurs in wet, alkaline soils in spring seeps and marshy edges of streams and ponds between 3,450 and 7,850 ft (1,152 and 2,393 m) in elevation (Sivinski 1996, p. 1; 2005a, pp. 3-4; Worthington 2002a, entire).

## **Taxonomy:**

## **Habitat/Life History:**

Wright's marsh thistle is a wetland obligate (occurs only in water-saturated soils) that was originally collected in 1851 at San Bernardino Cienaga, Cochise County, Arizona (Gray 1853, p. 101; Smithsonian 1849, p. 1). In the New Mexico portion of the species' range, *C. wrightii* appears to be an obligate of seeps, springs, and wetlands that have saturated soils with surface or subsurface water flow (Sivinski 1996, 2012, entire; Service 1998, pp. 1-2; Worthington 2002a, p. 2; NMRPTC 2009). Plants commonly found in areas inhabited by this species include *Scirpus* spp. (bulrush), *Salix* spp. (willow), *Baccharis glutinosa* (seepwillow), *Helianthus paradoxus* (Pecos sunflower), *Juncus* spp. (rush), and *Typha* spp. (cattail) (Sivinski 1996, pp. 2-5; Sivinski and Bleakly 2004, p. 2; Worthington 2002a, pp. 1-2).

## **Historical Range/Distribution:**

Wright's marsh thistle has been extirpated from all previously known locations in Arizona (Sivinski 1996, pp. 1, 4, 9, 2006a, 2009a, p. 1, 2012, p. 2; Worthington 2002a, p. 4; Baker 2011, entire), and was misidentified and likely not ever present in Texas (Poole 1992, entire; 2010, entire; Sivinski 1996, p. 2). The status of the species in Mexico is uncertain, with few verified collections of the plant (Sivinski 2012, p. 5). In the United States, numerous surveys of potential habitat have been conducted over the years with few new localities documented (Poole 1992, entire; 2010, entire; Sivinski 1994, entire; 1996, entire; 2005, entire; 2009a, entire; Worthington 2002a, entire; Baker 2011, entire).

### **New Mexico**

#### **Roswell**

Wright's marsh thistle historically occurred in North Spring, at the Roswell Country Club, Roswell, New Mexico (Sivinski 1996, p. 4). However, the population has been extirpated following the alteration and loss of all vegetation, including *C. wrightii*, as a result of a private swimming pool being built on North Spring (Sivinski 1996, p. 4; New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF) 2005a, p. 18). Sivinski (1996, p. 4) and Sivinski and Tonne (2011, pp. 42-56) surveyed most of the springs in the vicinity of Roswell in 1995 and 2010 looking for *C. wrightii* populations and other imperiled species. All but one spring had been capped and diverted for domestic water, and no extant or new populations were found (Sivinski 1996, p. 4).

## Lake Valley

A population of Wright's marsh thistle was historically located within Lake Valley, Sierra County, New Mexico, but is considered extirpated (Sivinski 2005, p. 1). This site is now an abandoned mining settlement, but was historically a series of marshes and cienegas. The area was diked, channeled, and drained in the early 1900s and converted to row-crop agriculture (Sivinski 2005, p. 1). Suitable habitat for *C. wrightii* no longer exists within the valley (Sivinski 2005, p. 1; Sivinski and Tonne 2011, p. 40).

## Arizona

### San Bernardino Cienega

The population at the type locality (the place where the species was first found) from San Bernardino Cienega, Arizona, has not been found again since it was originally collected in 1851, although the area was surveyed in 2006 and 2010 (Sivinski 2006a, p. 1; 2009a, p. 1; Baker 2011, p. 3). This original locality is degraded and devoid of any cienega habitat that may have supported the species in the past (Baker 2011, pp. i, 3). Based on recent accounts, the species is likely extirpated from the State (Sivinski 1996, p. 4; 2009a, p. 1; ADGF 2001, p. 1; Service 2009a, p. 1; Baker 2011, p. 3).

## Current Range Distribution:

### New Mexico

#### Tularosa Creek, Otero County

The Tularosa Creek population of Wright's marsh thistle occurs on private land and the Mescalero Apache Reservation. The population at this site has significantly declined since 1995, from an estimated several thousand individual plants along 3.5 mi (5.6 km) of nearly continuous occupied marsh and wet meadows, to one small occupied locale with only four individual flowering plants along the same stretch in 2012 (Sivinski 1996, p. 3; 2009a, p. 2, 2012, p. 21). In 1995, this was the most extensive population in the Sacramento Mountains, but the site has become drier and dominated by the invasive plant *Phragmites australis* (common reed) since the 1995 survey (Sivinski 1996, p. 3; 2009a, p. 2; 2012, p. 21). This formerly large and extensive population has been nearly extirpated in just 17 years as the habitat has dried significantly (Bridge 2001, p. 1; Worthington 2002a, 1-6; Sivinski 2012, p. 21).

#### La Luz Canyon, Otero County

The small La Luz Canyon population of Wright's marsh thistle that occurs within about 430 to 540 ft<sup>2</sup> (40 to 50 m<sup>2</sup>) of spring habitat on Forest Service lands contained an estimated 35 to 50 flowering plants in 1995 and 2012 (Sivinski 1996, p. 3; 2005a, p. 4, 2012, p. 18). However, an adjacent small population of 10 plants in the same general area on private land 3 mi (5.8 km) east of La Luz Canyon was extirpated between 1995 and 2005, most likely from a severe scouring flood and alteration of the spring hydrology that led to the drying of habitat (Sivinski 2005a, p. 4; 2009a, p. 2).

#### Karr Canyon, Otero County

The Karr Canyon-Haynes Creek population of Wright's marsh thistle contains three locations and is the largest remaining in the Sacramento Mountains, containing approximately 875 flowering individuals in 2012 (Sivinski 2012, pp. 9-15). This population is clustered along about 1000 ft<sup>2</sup> (100 m<sup>2</sup>) of spring habitat within a highway right-of-way (Sivinski 1996, p. 2, 2005a, p. 4). The population in Haynes Canyon has been nearly extirpated since 1995 due to drying of the wetland, mowing, and overgrown vegetation and in 2012 contained only two flowering individuals (Sivinski 1996, p. 2, 2005a, p. 4; 2009a, p. 2, 2012; p. 15).

#### Silver Springs Canyon, Otero County

The small Silver Springs Canyon population of Wright's marsh thistle occurs on Forest Service land in a wet meadow and was estimated at 29 mature plants in 2012 (Sivinski 2012, p. 21). The population was observed from 2002 to 2012 and appears to be stable (Worthington 2002, p. 4; Service 2010b, p. 1; Sivinski 2012, p. 21). This population is growing within a seep and is adjacent to *C. vinaceum* (Sacramento Mountains thistle), a native plant listed as federally threatened (Worthington 2002, p. 4).

#### Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Chaves County

A large population of Wright's marsh thistle was found at BLNWR in 1998 and is associated with cienegas (wet meadows) and marshes in Units 3, 5, and 6 of the refuge (Service 1998, p. 1; 2010, p. 1). All known populations of *C. wrightii* on BLNWR occur within designated critical habitat of *Helianthus paradoxus* (Service 2010a, p. 6). When *C. wrightii* was discovered on BLNWR, the population was estimated between 1,680 and 2,130 flowering plants (Service 1998, p. 1; 1999, p. 25). Sivinski (2005a, p. 3) found there was no change in this population's distribution and abundance between 1999 and 2012. In 2009, the population was estimated to be thousands of individuals, the largest known population of *C. wrightii* (Sivinski 2009a, p. 2; 2012, p. 30).

#### Santa Rosa Wetlands, Guadalupe, County

The Santa Rosa area is a zone of karst topography (an area of erosive limestone), with numerous sinkhole lakes and artesian springs (ground water that is under pressure) within a 6-mi (9.7-km) diameter circular depression. The localities of Wright's marsh thistle are scattered within an assortment of marshes, spring seeps, and various sinkhole lakes, with flowering plants generally rare and occurring throughout 4 sections spread out over 4 square miles (mi<sup>2</sup>) (10 square kilometers (km<sup>2</sup>)). The total area actually occupied in this locality is about about 38 acres (ac) (15 hectare (ha)) and occurs on a mixture of State, private, and municipal lands, (Sivinski 1996, p. 4; 2012, p. 33-52; Sivinski and Bleakly 2004, pp. 1, 3; Service 2010c, pp. 1-2; 2011, entire). For instance, the 116-ac (47-ha) Blue Hole Cienega locality, owned by the State of New Mexico, is part of the overall population and contains occurrences of *C. wrightii* along a spring-fed creek and two adjacent seeps (Sivinski and Bleakly 2004, entire; Service 2010c, entire; 2011, entire; Sivinski 2012, p. 51). The other known localities in the area include El Rito Creek, private lands, ponds at an abandoned fish hatchery, Bass Lake, and Perch Lake (a large sinkhole that is partially developed for fishing and picnicking) (Sivinski 1996, p. 6; 2005a, p. 3; 2010a, p. 1; 2012, pp. 32-52; Sivinski and Bleakly 2004, entire). Many of the municipal habitats owned by the City of Santa Rosa have been filled and developed for recreation, leaving perhaps a few hundred *C. wrightii* remaining

in smaller, isolated occurrences within this area (Sivinski 1996, p. 6, 2009a, pp. 1-2; 2010a, p. 1; Sivinski and Bleakly 2004, p. 3; Service 2011, entire). Between 1995 and 2005, the overall Santa Rosa population was thought to be stable, estimated at several thousand plants (Sivinski 1996, p. 4; 2005a, p. 3); however, active filling of wetlands has led to the loss of *C. wrightii* plants in recent years (Service 2010c, entire).

#### Blue Spring, Eddy County

A new population of Wright's marsh thistle was discovered in 2009 at Blue Spring, New Mexico (Sivinski 2009, entire). This population was estimated at several hundred to a few thousand plants and occupies about 1 mi (1.6 km) of riparian habitat (Sivinski 2009, p. 1). Water flow at Blue Spring is generally perennial along the 2.5-mi (4-km) run that flows into the Black River (a tributary of the Pecos) near Black River Village, New Mexico (NMDGF 2007, p. 15). We have no other information on this locality.

#### Alamosa Springs, Socorro County

Another population of Wright's marsh thistle was discovered in 2005 at Alamosa Springs, New Mexico (Sivinski 2005, p. 1). There were an estimated 500-1,000 flowering adults confined to a small, spring-fed wetland within the Alamosa Creek Valley (a tributary of the Rio Grande), but none of the plants occurred along Ojo Caliente (Sivinski 2005, p. 1; 2010a, pp. 1-2; pp. 6-9). The remaining springs in the Alamosa Creek Valley are on private land and have not been surveyed.

#### Burro Cienega, Grant County

Wright's marsh thistle was experimentally planted on private land along the spring run of Burro Cienega, New Mexico (Sivinski 2011, p. 1). The planted rosettes were grown with seed collected from the population at Alamosa Springs, Socorro County. Suitable habitat at Burro Cienega is very small and located along the spring run (Sivinski 2011, p. 1).

### Arizona

#### San Bernardino Cienega

During the 2010 field season, 103 springs and wetlands were surveyed in Apache, Cochise, Coconino, Gila, Greenlee, Navajo, Pima, and Yavapai Counties (Baker 2011, p. 3). No individuals of Wright's marsh thistle were located. Most of the springs surveyed showed signs of heavy cattle grazing or had been capped or diverted (Baker 2011, p. 3).

### Texas

We found that *Cirsium* specimens from Texas have been confused because of the difficulty in distinguishing Wright's marsh thistle and *C. texanum* from herbarium sheets (Sivinski 1994, p. 1; 1994a, p. 1; Sivinski 2006a, p. 1). All of the collections from herbariums and references identifying *C. wrightii* localities in Texas are in error (Coulter 1881, p. 244; Kearney and Peebles 1951, p. 952; Correll and Johnson 1970, p. 1719; Texas A&M University 1975, p. 89; Martin and Hutchins 1981, p. 2002; Sivinski 1994, p. 1; 1996, p. 5). Furthermore, the presumed location from Presidio, Texas, that we identified in the 90-day finding (September 10, 2009; 74 FR 46544), is not *C. wrightii*, but most likely an undescribed species from northern Mexico (Poole 2010, p. 1).

Poole (1992, entire) evaluated 74 cienegas in Texas and conducted botanical surveys at 33 of the locations with the highest potential for *Helianthus paradoxus*, which has similar habitat requirements and sometimes overlaps with Wright's marsh thistle. No *C. wrightii* locations were found during these extensive botanical surveys (Poole 1992, entire). Similarly, we reviewed information from and contacted botanists who have surveyed the Diamond Y Preserve, Pecos County, Texas, owned by The Nature Conservancy. This preserve shares some of the same habitat characteristics, and many of the imperiled species found on BLNWR, including Pecos assimineia (*Assimineia pecos*), Pecos gambusia (*Gambusia nobilis*), and *Helianthus paradoxus* (Service 2005, pp. 4, 8; 2007, p. 10; Poole 2010, p. 1). We found that Diamond Y has been thoroughly surveyed, and it does not appear that *C. wrightii* occurs on the preserve. In summary, we do not have any verified historical collections or known extant populations from any locations in Texas (Poole 2010, p. 1; 2010a, p. 1) therefore, we conclude that *C. wrightii* has never been present within Texas.

## Mexico

### Chihuahua and Sonora

We have not been able to obtain any recent information on Wright's marsh thistle in Mexico. In fact, we have located only three herbarium specimens that were collected in Mexico. One specimen was collected in 1982 at Cerro Angostura Spring, Chihuahua, Mexico (Sivinski 2009a, p. 1, 2010, entire; 2012, p. 5; CONABIO 2010, entire). The second collection from Los Azules, Chihuahua, in 1998, was misidentified and is not *C. wrightii*. The third collection from Fronteras, Sonora, in 1890, has not yet been verified (Sivinski 2010, p. 1; 2012, p. 5). As such, the status of the species in Mexico is uncertain.

## Population Estimates/Status:

There are eight general localities of Wright's marsh thistle extant within New Mexico. Additional historical populations have been extirpated, including at least two larger and two smaller populations in New Mexico, and the population at the type locality in Arizona. The population at BLNWR is likely the most robust, with between 14,000 to 18,000 individuals (Sivinski 2012, p. 30). Santa Rosa contains scattered localities throughout four sections of land, and some of these have been extirpated recently. However, the population in 2012 was estimated between 12,000 to 14,000 individuals (Sivinski 2012, p. 52). The population along Tularosa Creek has undergone a significant reduction since 1995 and now contains only four individuals (Sivinski 2012, p. 21). The remaining populations in the Sacramento Mountains are mostly small, containing from two to perhaps several hundred individuals (Sivinski 2012, p. 9-24). The populations at Blue Spring and Alamosa Springs were recently discovered. There have been no subsequent surveys at Blue Spring to determine whether this population is stable or declining. Alternatively, in 2012, the population at Alamosa Springs was estimated at 900 flowering individuals (Sivinski 2012, p. 9), indicating a relatively stable status since its discovery in 2005.9). An experimental planting of 61 rosettes occurred at Burro Cienega in 2011, but was not monitored during 2012 to determine success or failure. The collections from Texas were misidentified, and we conclude *C. wrightii*



never occurred in the state. Finally, there is only one verified historic collection from Mexico, and no recent information on the status of the species from this population. For these reasons, the status of this species remains tenuous.

## Threats

### **A. The present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of its habitat or range:**

The most significant threat to Wright's marsh thistle is the alteration of the hydrology of its rare wetland habitat. In fact, much of the habitat of *C. wrightii* has been and continues to be severely altered and degraded because of past and present land and water management practices including: agriculture and urban development, diversion of springs, and drought. As described below, all of the extant localities may be affected by long-term drought, whereas four of the largest *C. wrightii* localities at Blue Spring, BLNWR, Santa Rosa, and Alamosa Creek have the potential to be further modified by ongoing and future water withdrawal. Changes in water tables throughout the range of *C. wrightii* have often resulted in diminished discharge from springs or complete loss of surface water. Therefore, there has been a trend of diminishing habitat quantity and excessive degradation of habitat quality for the species throughout its range.

#### Availability of Water

Wright's marsh thistle is found in association with seeps, springs, marshes, and wetlands that have saturated soils with surface or subsurface water flow (Sivinski 1996, pp. 2-7; Service 1998, p. 2; Worthington 2002a, p. 2; NMRPTC 2009, p. 2). Southwestern riparian and aquatic systems fluctuate due to seasonal and longer term drought and wet periods, floods, and fire. Habitats with fluctuating water levels create circumstances in which population sizes may vary over time, and populations may be periodically extirpated. Because the species occurs only in areas that are water-saturated, populations have a high potential for extirpation when habitat dries due to ground and surface water depletion, draining of wetlands, or drought. Loss of water from *C. wrightii* habitat occurs through changing precipitation patterns, drought, or as a result of human impacts from groundwater pumping (withdrawal) or diversion of surface water; this can lead to the degradation and extirpation of *C. wrightii* (Sivinski 1996, p. 5; 2005, p. 1; Forest Service 2008, p. 19). Moreover, the drying of *C. wrightii* habitat has led to a reduction in the numbers of plants, and, in some cases, a loss of all individuals at several localities (Sivinski 2005a, pp. 3-4; 2012, pp. 21, 33). For example, during the dry conditions from 1994 to 1996, many seeps and springs in the Sacramento Mountains ceased flowing and were completely dry (Sivinski 2006b, p. 12). Naturally occurring water loss from changes in precipitation patterns has affected the volume of water flow at numerous springs in the Sacramento Mountains (Forest Service 2003, p. 43).

#### Drought

The National Weather Service Forecast Office and the U.S. Drought Monitor for New Mexico indicate that New Mexico has continued to experience a severe to extreme drought from 2003 to

the present (Forest Service 2008, p. 22; National Weather Service 2013, entire). This has led to unusually low stream or spring flows and, in some instances, no flow (South Central Mountain 2002, p. 12; Forest Service 2003 pp. 53–54; Sivinski 2005a, pp. 3–4; Shomaker 2006 p. 8; Gardner and Thompson 2008, p. 2; Newton et al. 2009, entire). Within New Mexico, monsoonal summer precipitation can be very patchy, with some areas receiving considerably less rainfall than others. Newton et al. (2009, entire) studied the hydrogeology of the Sacramento Mountains and found that the fractures in the underlying geology exhibit significant control on surface and groundwater flow and possibly groundwater recharge. Overall, their data suggest that the recharge of water wells and groundwater is correlated to the amount of precipitation during monsoon storms at all elevations (Newton et al. 2009, p. 22). Wet periods during summer months can contribute significantly to recharge of the ground water in the Sacramento Mountains, but these are extremely rare events (Newton et al. 2009, entire). As such, drought has impacted the recharge of ground water tables throughout the Sacramento Mountains (Forest Service 2008, p. 22) and likely many of the habitats occupied by *C. wrightii* (National Weather Service 2013, entire). For this reason, the seasonal distribution of yearly precipitation can result in drought conditions and reduced water availability for some *C. wrightii* localities.

For Wright's marsh thistle, drought affects the size of an extant locality and likely the physical condition of plants remaining on the drying periphery of a wetland even when the water source does not dry out completely. The most severe drought recorded in New Mexico occurred between 1950 and 1956. If drought reduces the amount of groundwater recharge regionally, spring discharge or the areal extent of wetlands could also be reduced. Prolonged drought can lead to diminishment or drying of springs, which would have a negative impact on Wright's marsh thistle or its habitat. In 1995 and 2005, Sivinski (2005a, pp. 3–4) monitored the relative size of Wright's marsh thistle localities rangewide to document the relationship between water availability in suitable habitat and numbers and extent of plants. He found that when some localities dried, the plants were either extirpated or the spatial extent of the locality was much reduced in size (Sivinski 2005a, pp. 3–4). Moreover, drying of occupied habitat also resulted in *Typha latifolia* (cattail) being replaced by dense stands of *Phragmites australis* (Sivinski 2005a, pp. 3–4; 2012, p. 21), which may outcompete native vegetation including *C. wrightii* and significantly increase the threat of wildfire (see discussion below under "*Phragmites australis*").

River flows are also diminished during drought. The most severe drought recorded in New Mexico occurred between 1950 and 1956. If drought reduces the amount of groundwater recharge regionally, spring discharge or the areal extent of wetlands could also be reduced. Prolonged drought can lead to diminishment or drying of springs, which would have a negative impact on Wright's marsh thistle or its habitat. For example, comparing historical discharges reported in the Black River from 1952 to 1956 (daily mean flow of 15.4 cubic feet per second (cfs) (0.436 cubic meters per second (cms)) to recent discharges (2002 to 2006, daily mean flow of 10.1 cfs (0.286 cms)), flows in the Black River are currently lower than flows during the extreme drought of the 1950s (NMDGF 2007, p. 26). Prolonged drought could adversely impact habitat conditions by reducing hydrologic discharge through the wetland system, thereby desiccating riparian plant communities (NMDGF 2008, p. 33), including *C. wrightii*. Because of the documented extirpation and population reductions of the species caused by drought and the possibility of more widespread

drought accompanying climate change, we conclude that drought constitutes a threat to *C. wrightii*, both now and in the foreseeable future.

### Ground and Surface Water Depletion

Habitat loss due to ground and surface water depletion is a threat to Wright's marsh thistle. Sivinski (1994, pp. 1–2; 1996, p. 4; 2005, p. 1; 2006, p. 4) reported loss or degradation of habitat from water diversion or draining of wetlands in Chaves, Otero, and Sierra Counties, New Mexico, areas that historically supported *C. wrightii*. Increased water extraction in the last 100 years has contributed to the dramatic decline of most surface spring systems in the Chihuahuan Desert (Corps 2006, p. 4; Karges 2003 and references therein). A historical population in Lake Valley, Sierra County, New Mexico, was extirpated when the wetlands were drained and converted to agricultural use (Sivinski 2005, p. 1; 2006a, p. 1). Moreover, the appropriation of spring water rights for “beneficial use,” such as livestock water, farming, domestic use, or recreational facilities, typically uses points of diversion that can curtail natural surface flows and affect *C. wrightii* populations. For example, springs at the Alamosa Springs, Blue Spring, Sacramento Mountains, and Santa Rosa, which contain half of all known *C. wrightii* localities, are susceptible to appropriation by existing water rights and development of new water rights, which may pose future threats to the species (Forest Service 2008, pp. 23–24; Service 2008, pp. 12, 23; Sivinski 2012, pp. 9, 17, 27, 42–44). The marshes, springs, and seeps within La Luz Canyon of the Sacramento Mountains are currently and were likely historically diverted or drained for irrigation and agricultural use (Sivinski 1996, p. 5; 2012, p. 27; South Central Mountain 2002, p. 20). Many springs and streams in the Sacramento Mountains that were perennial during the 1900s have become intermittent or have dried completely, including La Luz Creek (Abercrombie 2003, p. 3). In this area, loss of water flow from human activities related to roads, trails, and the capture of spring water for municipal use have also been observed to affect the threatened species *Cirsium vinaceum* (Forest Service 2003, pp. 42–43). The same likely holds true for *C. wrightii*, although it has not been specifically investigated.

The severe decline in available surface and ground water since the 1990s is due largely to drought and human use (Shomaker 2006, pp. 8, 20, 26). Wright's marsh thistle occurrences in La Luz Canyon are within the municipal supply watershed, where pipelines divert water to the City of Alamogordo (Shomaker 2006, pp. 20, 26; Forest Service 2008, p. 21; Sivinski 2012, p. 27). The number of water wells drilled on both private and National Forest System lands within this area has increased since the 1950s, with the 1980s and 1990s being the most active years for drilling of domestic use wells (Forest Service 2008, p. 22). The total permitted groundwater extraction is approximately 2,400 acre feet per year (300 hectare-meters per year) (98,000,000 gallons per year) (370,000,000 liters per year) from nearly 300 wells (Forest Service 2008, p. 22).

In 2002, the New Mexico State Engineer declared the La Luz Canyon watershed as a Critical Management Area, which means no new groundwater appropriations would be allowed for nondomestic purposes (Forest Service 2008, p. 22). However, for domestic purposes, the demand for water use through surface diversion and ground water withdrawals is expected to increase as a result of the population increase. The human population in Alamogordo, Otero County, New Mexico, increased from about 30,000 to 36,000 from 1995 to 2000, and is expected to increase to

about 56,000 by 2040 (South Central Mountain 2002, p. 11). An increasing human population and its associated agricultural and economic activities will require additional water from this relatively dry region.

Current New Mexico State law provides that anyone may obtain a permit for a domestic well no matter what the consequences for anyone else's water rights or the impact on water resources for the area (Belin et al. 2003, p. 72). Between 2005 and 2045, the City of Alamogordo's water demand is expected to increase from 7,140 acre-feet per year to 10,842 acre-feet per year (881 hectare-meters per year to 1337 hectare-meters per year) (Shomaker 2006, pp. 43-44). By 2045, the City of Alamogordo will likely have a projected deficit of 6,258 acre-feet per year (772 hectare-meters per year) (more than 2 billion gallons per year) (more than 8 billion liters per year) (Shomaker 2006, p. 44). Withdrawal and diversion of water from wells located on Forest Service and private lands would continue to increase for the foreseeable future and compound the effects of the recent and ongoing drought, leading to increased degradation of wetland and riparian habitat (Forest Service 2008, p. 23), which contain Wright's marsh thistle localities. In the Sacramento Mountains, *C. wrightii* occurrences have been and will continue to be altered and potentially degraded by the issuance of a special use permit to maintain and operate water withdrawal from Forest Service lands (Forest Service 2008, p. 26). Development of additional water rights will likely dewater *C. wrightii* localities, constituting a threat to the species in this area for the foreseeable future.

The Blue Spring and Santa Rosa occurrences of Wright's marsh thistle are also within areas where water is currently drained from wetlands or diverted or withdrawn for domestic use, which may contribute to degradation and loss of its habitat (Sivinski 1996, p. 5; 2009, entire; 2009a, pp. 1-2; 2012, pp. 27, 42-44; NMDGF 2007, pp. 14, 17, 22). Additionally, any activity that would interrupt the flow of water from Alamosa Creek has the potential to impact *C. wrightii*. Irrigation and domestic use from about 50 farms does not appear to have reduced the baseflow of about 9 cfs (0.3 cms) from this spring-fed system (Sierra Soil and Water Conservation Service 2008, p. 2). However, the water withdrawals coupled with long-term drought would negatively affect Alamosa Creek.

The effects of ongoing and past maintenance and operation of existing water diversions can also limit the size of Wright's marsh thistle populations (Corps 2007, p. 29). Loss of springs and surface water flow in streams resulting from human use and drought have occurred throughout the Roswell Artesian Basin in New Mexico, often resulting in diminished discharge from springs or complete loss of surface water (Taylor 1983, 1987; Jones and Balleau 1996, pp. 4, 12; NMDGF 2005, p. 33, 2005a, p. 17; Sivinski 2012, p. 33). For example, the *C. wrightii* population on City of Roswell lands has been extirpated since the habitat is no longer suitable for the plant (NMDGF 2005, pp. 33-34; Sivinski 1996, pp. 4-5; 2006a, p. 5). Many of these spring systems could have harbored populations of *C. wrightii*; however, it is not possible to determine the extent of the loss of *C. wrightii* populations because many springs went dry before surveys could be conducted. Peak annual pumping of the alluvial aquifer (a water-bearing deposit of sand and gravel) in the Roswell Basin occurred in the 1950s. Since the 1950s, administration and metering of groundwater extraction in the basin by the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer has resulted in stabilization of groundwater levels (NMDGF 2005a, p. 18).

As artesian wells were developed in the Roswell area, discharge from the major springs declined proportionately and some of these springs cease to flow (Jones and Balleau 1996, p. 4). Surface water flow on BLNWR has also been diminished by groundwater pumping, as evidenced by the dead springs on Salt Creek and documented reduction in spring flows on the refuge (Jones and Balleau 1996; p. 12). Historical aerial photos show a larger, meandering channel for Bitter Creek; evidence that discharge from Bitter Creek was once greater (Service 2005a; 70 FR 46312, August 9, 2005). Additionally, BLNWR actively lowers the water levels in wetlands during spring and summer (Service 2006, p. 2). It is unknown how *C. wrightii* responds to these changing water levels on the refuge, but if soils are not continuously saturated throughout the growing season, the species is likely impacted. Information from other localities suggests that populations likely contract or habitat may become invaded by *Phragmites australis* as water is withdrawn and parts of the occupied wetlands dry (Sivinski 2005a, pp. 3-4; 2012, p. 21).

Surface diversions, primarily for irrigation, and groundwater pumping for domestic and commercial uses also occur at the Blue Spring locality (NMDGF 2007, p. 22; Lusk 2008, entire). Flow in the Black River is sustained by springs, including Rattlesnake and Blue Springs, and is generally perennial in the reaches around these springs (NMDGF 2007, p. 15). Discharge at Blue Spring has varied over the past 100 years: in 1907, it was recorded at 15.2 cfs (0.430 cms), with a minimum of 14.65 cfs (0.415 cms) (Bjorklund and Motts 1959, pp. 251, 263); from 1952 to 1956, discharge varied from 8.5 to 14 cfs (0.24 to 0.40 cms), with a mean of 12 cfs (0.34 cms) (Bjorklund and Motts 1959, p. 268); and from 2002 to 2006, the mean was 11.75 cfs (0.333 cms), with a range from 6.8 to 23 cfs (0.19 to 0.65 cms) (NMDGF 2007, p.15). Bjorklund and Motts (1959, pp. 247, 263) first reported that water levels within the Black River Valley (including Blue Spring) declined during the late summer and during droughts, mostly from heavy groundwater pumping and lack of aquifer recharge. Based on flows recorded in recent years (2000–2006) at Blue Springs and in the Black River above the Carlsbad Irrigation District diversion, more surface water is appropriated than is available in the system (R. Turner, New Mexico Office of the State Engineer, pers. comm., April 2007; cited in NMDGF 2007, p. 25). This constitutes a significant threat to this locality.

In summary, the alteration and loss of Wright's marsh thistle habitat, due to groundwater and surface water depletion, will continue and likely increase in the foreseeable future. Because this species is dependent on water, we find that long-term drought in combination with ground and surface water withdrawal is currently a significant threat to *C. wrightii* and its habitat, and will continue to be in the foreseeable future.

### Oil and Gas Development and Mining

Oil and gas development occurs in some areas occupied by Wright's marsh thistle. Since 2001, there has been a significant expansion of oil and gas operations in Eddy County, especially within the Black River watershed and, in particular, around Blue Spring (NMDGF 2005, p. 35; 2007, pp. 18–19; Sivinski 2012, p. 27). Several low-water crossings span the Black River. Transit of heavy trucks carrying petroleum-derived products could result in surface water contamination from leakage or accidents (NMDGF 2007a, p. 20). Similarly, oil and gas development in this area of southeastern New Mexico has the potential to impact groundwater (Goodbar 2007, pp. 213–214).

As an example, there is a history of oil and gas industry operations on and adjacent to BLNWR, which have resulted in the spillage of oil and brine onto the refuge (NMDGF 2002, pp. 3–4; Service 2005a). Development of oil and gas wells is anticipated to continue into the foreseeable future in the proximity of *C. wrightii* habitat (Service 2005a, p. 46306; Sivinski 2012, p. 27). Oil drilling also occurs throughout the Roswell Basin and Eddy County, New Mexico (NMDGF 2002, pp. 2–4, 2005a, pp. 25, 78; Service 2005a, p. 46315; Goodbar 2007, entire). This activity and associated actions can threaten the water quality of the aquifer on which this species depends. Petroleum contamination has also been reported from groundwater samples from the Black River and areas adjacent to BLNWR (Richard 1989, entire; NMDGF 2005a, pp. 18–19).

Additionally, a permit was recently issued by the New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department for subsurface drilling and exploration of the mineral bertrandite on Sullivan Ranch (New Mexico Mining and Minerals Division 2010), near the Wright's marsh thistle locality at Alamosa Springs, Socorro County, New Mexico, which has the potential to affect the species (NMDGF 2000, entire; Sivinski 2009c, entire; 2012, p. 9). However, no specific assessment of potential water quality threats has been conducted, and it is unknown whether a decrease in water quality from oil and gas development or contamination from exploration of minerals would affect the growth or reproduction of *C. wrightii* to such an extent as to constitute a widespread threat to the species. Nevertheless, oil and other contaminants from development and drilling activities throughout these areas could enter the aquifer supplying the springs and seeps inhabited by *C. wrightii* when the limestone layers are pierced by drilling activities (Sivinski 2012, p. 9). An accidental oil spill or groundwater contamination has the potential to pollute water sources that support *C. wrightii* and potentially threaten the species in the foreseeable future, although it is unclear whether these impacts would be localized or widespread threats to the species.

## Introduced Plants

Introduced plants increase the potential for habitat loss due to wildfire and competition with Wright's marsh thistle. *Phragmites australis* has recently invaded half of the known *C. wrightii* localities (BLNWR, Tularosa Creek, Santa Rosa, and Karr Canyon), forming dense stands in areas and increasing fuel load and threat of wildfire. Standing dead canes of *P. australis* and associated litter often constitute twice as much biomass as living shoots (Forest Service 2010, entire). The high productivity and density of *P. australis* stands provide fuel loads that are often high. This abundant dead fuel carries fire well, allowing stands to burn even when the current year's shoots are green (Forest Service 2010, entire).

As an example, on March 5, 2000, the Sandhill fire burned 1,000 ac (405 ha) of the western portion of the BLNWR, including portions of Bitter Creek. The fire burned through Dragonfly Spring, eliminating the vegetation shading the spring. Although Wright's marsh thistle does not occur immediately within the burned area, the changes to wetland vegetation exemplify how its habitat might respond following wildfire. The pre-fire dominant vegetation of submerged aquatic plants and mixed native grasses within the burned area has been replaced by the invasive *Phragmites australis* (NMDGF 2005, p. 19-21). The *P. australis* present at BLNWR is likely of European origin (Service 2006, p. 5). Prior to the wildfire, small patches of *P. australis* occurred throughout Bitter

Creek, whereas post-fire, *P. australis* colonized the burned area to form a continuous dense stand (NMDGF 2005, pp. 19-21). Stands of *P. australis* have also recently become a dominant plant in other *C. wrightii* localities (Sivinski 2005a, pp. 3-4; Sivinski and Bleakly 2004, p. 5). Controlled burns have been implemented on BLNWR to burn grass, sedge, cattail, and nonnative vegetation (*Salsola* spp. (Russian thistle and tumbleweed)), in an attempt to reduce the risk of large uncontrolled wildfires by removing excessive amounts of *Salsola* spp. and *P. australis* (Service 2006). This may temporarily reduce the threat of wildfire in one area of BLNWR, but repeated prescribed burns are likely needed to continually suppress *P. australis* growth (Service 2006, pp. 4-5).

No measures are being implemented in the other localities to reduce *P. australis*. Moreover, temperatures from prescribed burns are rarely high enough to be lethal to *P. australis* or to penetrate deeply into the wet or moist soils common in their habitat (Forest Service 2010 and references therein). Prescribed fire burns above-ground parts of *P. australis*, but below-ground rhizomes usually survive and produce plants later in the growing season or in subsequent years (Forest Service 2010 and references therein). Rarely is *P. australis* abundance decreased by fire, and postfire recovery is typically rapid. As such, prescribed fire likely will do little to reduce the long-term threat of *P. australis* to *C. wrightii*.

In addition to increasing the potential for wildfire, *Phragmites australis* can also quickly invade a site and take over a wetland, crowding out native plants and changing hydrology (Plant Conservation Alliance 2005, p. 1). The dense plant growth blocks sunlight to other plants growing in the immediate area and occupies all available habitat, turning many wetlands into dense stands that support only *P. australis* (Plant Conservation Alliance 2005, p. 1; Sivinski 2012, p. 33). Two Wright's marsh thistle localities have recently been either extirpated (an occurrence in Karr Canyon), or significantly reduced in size (Tularosa Creek), following an expansion of *P. australis* (Sivinski 1996, p. 2, 2005a, p. 4; 2009a, p. 2; 2012, p. 21). *P. australis* is a current threat and will likely be a continuing threat for *C. wrightii* localities through increased fire risk, competition, and changes in hydrology, especially when habitat is disturbed through burning or drying.

## Invasive Plants

The potential impact of *P. australis* on *C. wrightii* habitat has been discussed in threat factor A, above. The following additional invasive terrestrial plant species have the potential to affect *C. wrightii* at most localities: *Lythrum salicaria* (purple loosestrife), *Elaeagnus angustifolia* (Russian olive), *Tamarix* spp., *Salsola* spp., *Dipsacus fullonum* (teasel), *Carduus nutans* (musk thistle), *Conium maculatum* (poison hemlock), *Centaurea melitensis*, *Cirsium arvense* (Canada thistle), *Saccharum ravennae* (Ravenna grass), *Acroptilon repens* (Russian knapweed), and *Cirsium vulgare* (bull thistle). These plants present unique challenges and potential threats to the habitat of *C. wrightii*. However, most of the exotic plants cannot tolerate the continuously saturated substrates that are typical in *C. wrightii* habitats. For example, *Carduus nutans* infests much of the riparian habitat on Lincoln National Forest (Gardner and Thompson 2008, pp. 1, 4), but does not appear to impact Wright's marsh thistle through competition. Sivinski (1996, p. 6; 2012, p. 51) reports that *Tamarix* spp. and *E. angustifolia* are becoming dominant in many riparian and wetland areas; but,

that these species likely do not threaten *C. wrightii* because *C. wrightii* grows in saturated substrates that are not suitable habitat for these exotic trees. Nevertheless, they do invade wetlands when the area dries (e.g., due to severe drought) and, once they become established, can survive in wet habitats when the moisture returns (Sivinski 2007, p. 2). Still, *Tamarix* spp. may impact spring habitats primarily through the amount of water it consumes, and from the chemical composition of the leaves it drops on the ground and into the springs. *Tamarix* spp. leaves add salt to the soil through its leaf litter (the leaves contain salt glands) (Di Tomaso 1998, entire). Because *Tamarix* spp. grow along the edge of water courses, it is possible that this could affect the soil chemistry of areas inhabited by *C. wrightii*. However, no research has been conducted specifically on the effect of *Tamarix* spp. or *E. angustifolia* on *C. wrightii*.

*Salsola* spp. is another introduced plant species that has the potential to degrade spring ecosystems. *Salsola* spp. is not a riparian species like *Tamarix* spp. (salt cedar) or *P. australis*; however, the plant can accumulate in spring channels following wind storms. In 2005, BLNWR conducted an emergency Intra-Service consultation under section 7 of the Act for the removal of *Salsola* spp. and *Kochia scoparia* (tumbleweed) from a spring ditch (Service 2005b). Wind had blown these plants into the channel to a depth of 3 to 4 ft (0.9 to 1.2 m), completely shading the water and overloading the small channel with organic material. Noel (1954, p. 124) also reported *Salsola* spp. accumulating in a spring near Roswell. We are not aware of this situation occurring at other localities, but we have not regularly monitored all Wright's marsh thistle localities for *Salsola* spp. occurrences. Therefore, it is unknown whether this is a threat to the species. Nevertheless, control of *Salsola* spp. is an ongoing management activity at BLNWR, and may occur within areas occupied by *C. wrightii*.

The eight localities of Wright's marsh thistle generally lack large, aggressive, exotic wetland weeds, such as *Lythrum salicaria* (purple loosestrife), which could dominate *C. wrightii* habitat. *Lythrum salicaria* is a Eurasian species that has been modifying wetlands and competing with native species in North America for many decades (Natural Resources Conservation Service 2000, pp. 1-2). *Lythrum salicaria* appeared in New Mexico in the 1990s and is extant in the Mimbres Mountains, Grant County, and Sandia Mountains, Bernalillo County. The Sandia Mountains occurrence of this invasive weed covers an alkaline spring seep similar to some of the *C. wrightii* habitats in the Sacramento Mountains (Sivinski 2006b, p. 15). If it also spreads to any of the eight localities, this aggressive wetland weed could impact *C. wrightii* habitat.

We currently have no information that these introduced plants are immediate threats to Wright's marsh thistle. However, *Carduus nutans* may be serving as a vector for *Rhinocyllus conicus*, the exotic seed head weevil, discussed under Factor C. Based on possible interactions with water availability and climate change, these exotic plants could potentially threaten *C. wrightii* in the future; however, we do not believe they pose a current threat.

### Ungulate Grazing

Grazing likely impacts some localities of Wright's marsh thistle, but does not appear to be a widespread threat to the species. It is estimated that livestock grazing has damaged approximately 80 percent of stream and riparian ecosystems in the western United States (Belsky et al. 1999, p.



419). The damage occurs from increased sedimentation, decreased water quality, and trampling and overgrazing of stream banks where succulent forage exists (Armour et al. 1994, p. 10; Fleischner 1994, p. 631; Belsky et al. 1999, p. 419). Moreover, many acres of marsh habitats at Santa Rosa have been plowed and converted to *Festuca pratensis* (meadow fescue) pasture for livestock grazing (Service 2005, p. 10; Corps 2007, p. 25). In the semi-arid southwestern United States, wet marshes and other habitat of *C. wrightii* attract ungulates because of the availability of water and high-quality forage (Hendrickson and Minckley 1984, p. 134). Similar to *C. vinaceum*, dry periods likely increase the effects of livestock trampling and herbivory on *C. wrightii* when other water and forage plants are not available (75 FR 30761, June 2, 2010). Grazing may be more concentrated within habitats similar to those occupied by *C. wrightii* during drought years, when livestock are prone to congregate in wetland habitats where forage production is greater than in adjacent dry uplands (Forest Service 2003, pp. 33, 53). There are no studies specifically related to the effects of livestock grazing on *C. wrightii* (NMRPTC 2009, p. 2); however, observations suggest that *C. wrightii* and its spring habitats can be heavily impacted by livestock (Sivinski 2012, pp. 12, 39, 42, 47).

The localities in the Sacramento Mountains, Santa Rosa, Alamosa Springs, and Blue Spring have the potential to be subjected to trampling and herbivory (Service 1994, p. 6, 2005c, p. 2; NMDGF 2000, p. 2, 2004, p. 7, 2005, p. 47; Corps 2007, p. 25; 75 FR 30762, June 2, 2010; Sivinski 2012, pp. 12, 39, 42, 47). For example, about three quarters of *C. wrightii* individuals were grazed at one locality near Santa Rosa (Corps 2007, p. 25). Additionally, much of the private wet meadows and marsh habitats in the Santa Rosa area has been severely degraded by livestock grazing for many years (Sivinski and Bleakly 2004, entire). Except for Blue Hole Cienega and two other small locations in Santa Rosa, we are not aware of any fences enclosing these localities that would limit impacts to the species. In the Sacramento Mountains, for example, springs and marshes provide a majority of the watering sites for both livestock and wildlife species, especially elk (75 FR 30762, June 2, 2010). These wet springs and marshes are subject to trampling and hoof damage, and receive especially heavy use during drought periods, when neither water nor green forage are readily available elsewhere. Trampling could easily result in damage to seedlings, rosettes, and flowering stalks, thereby preventing reproduction by affected plants. It is possible that elk and livestock grazing within and adjacent to spring ecosystems could alter or remove habitat or limit the distribution of *C. wrightii*; however, we found little information to support this possibility. Still, we believe the observations of livestock and elk herbivory and trampling that directly affect *C. vinaceum* and its habitat likely are also occurring in some of the *C. wrightii* localities; however, it is unknown whether these are localized or widespread threats to the species.

In summary, while livestock activities do not appear to be a widespread threat at the current time, localized impacts have been observed, and increased use of wet springs and marshes during drought conditions constitutes a threat in the foreseeable future. We will continue to monitor livestock grazing and trampling to determine whether *C. wrightii* is threatened.

#### Wetland Filling and Development

As described below, wetland filling and development have impacted the Santa Rosa locality, but do

not appear to be a threat to the species at this time. A substantial percentage of wetlands in the Santa Rosa area has disappeared in the last 50 to 80 years (Metric Corporation et al. 2002, p. 5). Springs that fed suitable habitat for *Helianthus paradoxus* and likely also contained Wright's marsh thistle have been converted to swimming pools and fishing ponds or drained and filled for sports fields in the towns of Roswell and Santa Rosa, New Mexico (Sivinski and Bleakly 2004, p. 1; Service 2005, p. 8). Moreover, some springs and associated wetlands where *C. wrightii* occurred have been drained and developed, and the potential for further development exists (Metric Corporation 2001; Metric Corporation et al. 2002; Sivinski 2009a, p. 1; Sivinski and Bleakly 2004, p. 1; Service 2008b, p. 42).

Some of the Wright's marsh thistle occurrences within the Santa Rosa locality continue to be impacted through filling and development and regular mowing of their habitat. *C. wrightii* occurs at the Blue Hole fish hatchery ponds that are owned by the City of Santa Rosa (Sivinski 1996, p. 4). The City of Santa Rosa plans to dredge and fill these ponds for municipal use in the foreseeable future (Service 2008b, p. 42), which would undoubtedly impact the species. A similar action occurred in 2001 when the *C. wrightii* population at Power Dam Municipal Park in Santa Rosa was extirpated when the reservoir was drained (Sivinski 2005a, p. 3; 2009a, p. 1). Numerous wetlands in Santa Rosa were also lost many years ago to an impoundment in which 17 ponds were created and used for a fish hatchery. The fish hatchery has since been abandoned, and all but four of the ponds filled. The remaining adjacent 116 ac (47 ha) of the Blue Hole Cienega were purchased by the State of New Mexico to protect habitat that includes the federally threatened *Helianthus paradoxus*, *C. wrightii*, and the State-endangered *Spiranthes magnicamporum* (Great Plains lady's tresses) (New Mexico State Forestry 2008, p. 1). Although we are not aware of any other specific residential or commercial development plans at this or other localities, actions that drain or fill wetlands or other habitat occupied by the species would impact *C. wrightii*.

### Summary of Factor A

In summary, we found that past and present alteration of rare desert springs, seeps, and wetland habitats that support Wright's marsh thistle is a significant threat. The four largest localities of *C. wrightii* at Blue Spring, BLNWR, Santa Rosa, and Alamosa Creek have the potential to be further modified by ongoing and future water withdrawal. Changes in water tables throughout the range of *C. wrightii* have also resulted in diminished discharge from springs or complete loss of surface water. Therefore, there has been a trend of diminishing habitat quantity and excessive degradation of habitat quality for the species throughout its range, as a result of agriculture and urban development, diversion of springs, and drought. Moreover, the presence of and effects from *Phragmites australis* threatens *C. wrightii* localities through increased fire risk, competition, and changes in hydrology. On the basis of the information presented above, we find that Wright's marsh thistle may be threatened by the present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of its habitat, both now and in the foreseeable future.

We do not currently consider oil and gas development and mining, introduced plants, ungulate grazing, or wetland filling and development as threats to the species; however, these may become threats in the future. Similarly, except for *P. australis*, we do not consider invasive plants as a

significant threat to the species now; however, they could potentially threaten *C. wrightii* in the foreseeable future. We do consider *P. australis* to be a threat to *C. wrightii* localities as a result of the increased fire risk, competition, and changes in hydrology its presence causes.

## **B. Overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes:**

We do not have any evidence of risks to Wright's marsh thistle from overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes, and we have no reason to believe this factor will become a threat to the species in the future. Therefore, we find overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes does not threaten *C. wrightii* now or in the foreseeable future.

## **C. Disease or predation:**

### Disease

Wright's marsh thistle is not known to be affected or threatened by any disease. Therefore, we find that disease does not threaten *C. wrightii* now or in the foreseeable future.

### Insect Predation

Native and nonnative insect populations have the potential to impact the condition, reproduction, and distribution of Wright's marsh thistle. Observed seed predators on the similar *C. vinaceum* in the Sacramento Mountains include *Paracantha gentilis*, a native specialist gall fly; *Platyptilia carduidactyla*, the native artichoke plume moth; *Euphoria inda*, a native generalist bumble flower beetle; *Rhinocyllus conicus*, an introduced seed-head weevil; and *Trichosiromus horridus*, an introduced rosette weevil (Sivinski 2008, pp. 1–11; Gardner 2010, pp. 2-3). There have been intentional releases of *R. conicus* to control *Carduus nutans* (musk thistle) (Sivinski 1994, p. 2; 2007, p. 6; AGFD 2001, p. 2; Bridge 2001, p. 1; NMRPTC 2009, p. 2). This exotic weevil has recently been found in habitat occupied by *C. wrightii*, *C. vinaceum*, and the exotic *C. nutans* at the Silver Springs locality (Sivinski 2007, p. 6; Gardner and Thompson 2008, p. 4). It is not known where *T. horridus* came from or whether they were intentionally released (Gardner 2010, p. 3); however, this exotic rosette weevil is also present in *C. nutans* populations ranging from the northern extent of the Mescalero Apache reservation south to Agua Chiquita canyon in the Sacramento Mountains.

*Rhinocyllus conicus* is not host specific to *Carduus* species and has been found living on 22 of the North American *Cirsium* species (Louda et al. 2003, entire). This weevil is available from commercial suppliers and is easily gathered and transported from established colonies. Breeding and egg placement by *R. conicus* begins in mid-June, peaks in early July, and continues into August (Sivinski 2008, p. 5). Newly hatched larvae bury into the flower head and feed on the tissue. Most *R. conicus* at the Silver Springs locality emerge from the flower heads by early September; however, some immature larvae were still present in the flower heads of *C. vinaceum* in September

(Sivinski 2008, p. 5). Flower heads of *C. wrightii* grow during late July to early August, which overlaps with developing and feeding larvae of *R. conicus*. The establishment of *R. conicus* beyond the Silver Springs locality will likely occur in the near future because stands of *C. nutans* are common in many of the drainages throughout the Sacramento Mountains (Gardner and Thompson 2008, p. 4), and we are concerned that it may spread to *C. wrightii* populations. For these reasons, we intend to monitor localities in the Sacramento Mountains to determine whether *C. wrightii* could be a potential host and possibly threatened by *R. conicus* infestations.

*Trichosiocalus horridus*, feeds on *C. nutans* during the rosette stage, killing first-year rosettes and stopping the growth of older plants. This weevil is available from commercial suppliers or can be gathered and transported from established colonies (Flanders et al. 2001, p. 4; Jennings et al. 2010, pp. 4-5). Moreover, *T. horridus* is capable of spreading at least a mile (1.6 km) per year on its own (Flanders et al. 2001, p. 4). Adults emerge from summer resting places in the fall. They lay eggs in the midrib of thistle leaves, and complete egg-laying in the spring. After 10 to 12 days, the eggs hatch, and the young weevils tunnel from the midrib into the rosette, feeding and causing damage or possibly killing the crown tissue. The new adults emerge in May and June, feed briefly, and pass the summer in a period of inactivity (Flanders et al. 2001, p. 3). We are concerned about potential effects to *C. wrightii* and intend to monitor *C. wrightii* localities to determine if this introduced rosette weevil threatens the species.

*Rhinocyllus conicus* and a native predator, the stem borer weevil (*Lixus pervestitus*), caused a widespread premature stem death to the flower heads of the Silver Springs population of the endangered *C. vinaceum* (Sivinski 2007, pp. 8-12). These 2 insects collectively damaged up to 99 percent of *C. vinaceum* within the Silver Springs locality, resulting in nearly complete die-off of flowering stems (Sivinski 2008, p. 9, 2009b). Thus far, *L. pervestitus* has not been found on *C. vinaceum* outside of the Silver Springs population, and little is known about this insect species in New Mexico (Sivinski 2008, pp. 10-11). Nevertheless, the reproductive output of the population of *C. vinaceum* at Silver Springs was greatly reduced by these insects. Similarly, it is unknown if these weevils feed on *C. wrightii* or have the same level of impact as that of *C. vinaceum*.

#### Summary of Factor C

In summary, it is not known at this time whether insect predators would decrease seed production and increase the threat to the existence of Wright's marsh thistle populations. The potential for insect predators to become a threat to *C. wrightii* in the future needs to be monitored and evaluated. Therefore, we intend to monitor populations, especially in the Sacramento Mountains, for impacts due to insect predation.

#### **D. The inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms:**

One primary cause of decline of Wright's marsh thistle is the loss, degradation, and fragmentation of habitat due to human activities. Federal and State laws have been insufficient to prevent past and ongoing losses of the limited habitat of the species, and are unlikely to prevent further declines.

#### Clean Water Act

Pursuant to section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA) (33 U.S.C. 1344), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) regulates the discharge of dredged or fill material into all waters of the United States, including wetlands. In general, the term “wetlands” refers to areas meeting the Corps criteria of having hydric (wet) soils, hydrology (either a defined minimum duration of continuous inundation or saturation of soil during the growing season), and a plant community that is predominantly hydrophytic vegetation (plants specifically adapted for growing in a wetland environment). Much of the habitat occupied by Wright’s marsh thistle qualifies as wetlands.

Any discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States, including wetlands, requires a permit from the Corps. These include individual permits, which would be issued following a review of an individual application, and general permits that authorize a category or categories of activities in a specific geographical location or nationwide (33 CFR parts 320–330). General and special permit conditions may vary among the various general permits. Although the use of any individual or general permit requires compliance with the Act when there are threatened or endangered species present, only three (Santa Rosa, BLNWR, and Silver Springs) of the eight localities co-occur with either *Helianthus paradoxus* or *Cirsium vinaceum*, which are both listed under the Act. Even at these three localities, we are not aware of any protections that have been provided by the CWA.

While the CWA provides a means for the Corps to regulate the discharge of dredged or fill material into waters and wetlands of the United States, it does not always provide adequate protection of wetlands. Private and State landowners of wetlands are often unaware of this permitting requirement, and may fill or drain their lands without requesting determination of wetland status or a permit (Service 2005, p. 22). For example, in 2003, the New Mexico Department of Transportation violated the CWA in the right-of-way of Highway 91 in Santa Rosa within *Helianthus paradoxus* habitat (New Mexico Department of Transportation 2003, pp. 1-2; Service 2008c, p. 12). In 2001, the New Mexico Department of Transportation also mowed *Helianthus paradoxus* in the wetland within the right-of-way of La Pradira Avenue (now Blue Hole Road) and proposed to destroy at least 20 Wright’s marsh thistle plants in conjunction with reconstruction of the road (Metric Corporation 2001, pp. 12, 21). Many applicants are required to provide compensation for wetlands losses (i.e., no net loss), and many smaller impact projects remain largely unmitigated, unless specifically required by other environmental laws such as the Act. Specifically, we found that *C. wrightii* localities are not currently protected from the construction and maintenance of irrigation facilities and functionally related structures, which are exempt from Section 404 of the CWA, and therefore, do not receive any general protections that may have resulted from status determination and permitting process by the Corps (Corps 2007, entire). Finally, we are not aware of any Corps permits that have been issued for the habitat where this species occurs or historically occurred, indicating that there is little protection provided to *C. wrightii* through the CWA.

Additionally, court cases limit the Corps’ ability to utilize the CWA to regulate the discharge of fill or dredged material into the aquatic environment within the current range of Wright’s marsh thistle (Solid Waste Agency of Northern Cook County v. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 531 U.S. 159 (2001) (SWANCC)). Additionally, there may be instances where wet marshes occupied by *C.*

wrightii lack sufficient connection to waters of the United States for the Corps to assert jurisdiction under the authority of the CWA. For example, the Corps frequently cites the SWANCC decision as their reason for not taking jurisdiction over water bodies that do not meet the definition of waters of the United States. For these reasons, we conclude that regulation of wetland filling by the Corps under the CWA is inadequate to protect *C. wrightii* from further decline.

## State of New Mexico

The State of New Mexico lists Wright's marsh thistle as endangered under the New Mexico Endangered Plant Species Act (9-10-10 NMSA). As such, *C. wrightii* is protected from unauthorized collection, transport, or sale. This law prohibits the taking, possession, transportation and exportation, selling or offering for sale of any listed plant species. Listed species can be collected only under permit from the State of New Mexico for scientific studies and impact mitigation. However, this law does not provide any protection for *C. wrightii* habitat. Moreover, there are no statutory requirements under the jurisdiction of the State of New Mexico that serve as an effective regulatory mechanism for reducing or eliminating the threats (see Factors A and C above) that may adversely affect *C. wrightii* or its habitat. Nor are there any requirements under the New Mexico State statutes to develop a recovery plan that will restore and protect existing habitat for the species. Therefore, the species does not have a recovery plan, conservation plan, or conservation agreement. For these reasons, we find that existing New Mexico State regulatory mechanisms are currently inadequate to protect *C. wrightii*. As noted, these designations provide no regulatory protection for the habitat or the species to prevent further decline.

## Other Federal Protections

Under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.) and the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (16 U.S.C. 1600 et seq.), the Forest Service is directed to prepare programmatic-level management plans to guide long-term resource management decisions. Under this direction, Wright's marsh thistle is on the Regional Forester's Sensitive Species List (Forest Service 2008a). The Forest Service policy (FSM 2670.3) states that biological evaluations must be completed for sensitive species and signed by a journey-level biologist or botanist. The Lincoln National Forest will continue developing biological evaluation reports and conducting analyses under the National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.) for each project that will affect *C. wrightii* or its habitat. Nevertheless, only 2 of the 8 general localities occur on Forest Service lands, and these are extremely small, composed of less than 70 plants total. Therefore, even if protections were afforded to the species due to its Forest Service sensitive-species status, the number of localities is insufficient to conserve *C. wrightii* rangewide.

## Incidental Protections Resulting from Association with Other Listed Species

BLNWR was established in 1937 as wintering and breeding grounds for migratory birds. Wright's marsh thistle was not known to occur on the refuge until 1998 (Service 1998, entire). Consequently, management was directed primarily at creating dikes so that ponds could be created and their water levels controlled for the benefit of waterfowl. This likely was beneficial to *C. wrightii* by unknowingly creating more habitat. Although current management of BLNWR recognizes and

includes federally listed species in its maintenance and operations, because *C. wrightii* is not a federally threatened or endangered species, we are aware of only one project that has specifically considered and incorporated measures to limit impacts on the species or specifically analyzed whether actions proposed by the refuge would cause any adverse effects (Service 2010a, p. 7).

#### Summary of Factor D

In summary, Wright's marsh thistle receives inadequate protection from the CWA. Similarly, the species lacks adequate regulatory protection from its various designations—a Forest Service sensitive species, or endangered status by the State of New Mexico—because these designations only serve to notify the public of the species' status and do not require conservation or management actions. We are not aware of any other existing regulatory mechanisms. Wright's marsh thistle is currently threatened by the inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms. This will continue into the foreseeable future.

### **E. Other natural or manmade factors affecting its continued existence:**

#### Climate Change

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states that warming of the climate system is unequivocal based on observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice, and rising global average sea level (2007a, p. 5). For the next two decades, a warming of about 0.4 degrees Fahrenheit (°F) (0.2 degrees Celsius (°C)) per decade is projected (IPCC 2007a, p. 12). Temperature projections for the following years increasingly depend on specific emission scenarios (IPCC 2007a, p. 13). Various emissions scenarios suggest that average global temperatures are expected to increase by between 1.1 °F and 7.2 °F (0.6 °C and 4.0 °C) by the end of the 21st century, with the greatest warming expected over land (IPCC 2007a, p. 13). Warming in western mountains is projected to cause decreased snowpack, more winter flooding, and reduced summer flows, exacerbating competition for over-allocated water resources (IPCC 2007b, p. 14). The IPCC reports that it is very likely that hot extremes, heat waves, and heavy precipitation and flooding will increase in frequency (IPCC 2007b, p. 18).

Based on current understanding of climate change, air temperatures are expected to rise and precipitation patterns are expected to change in areas occupied by Wright's marsh thistle. Because *C. wrightii* occupies relatively small areas of spring or seep habitat in an arid region plagued by drought and ongoing aquifer withdrawals (e.g., in the Roswell Basin), it may be vulnerable to climatic changes that could decrease the availability of water to suitable habitat. Discharges in the Black River (fed by Blue Spring, the *C. wrightii* locality, and other spring sources) are currently lower than the previously lowest discharge measured in the 1950s (NMDGF 2007, p. 15-16). Moreover, Sivinski (2005a, pp. 3-4) reports that springs and wet valleys have been affected by drought in at least three canyons of the Sacramento Mountains, New Mexico, resulting in reduced

*C. wrightii* populations. Similar water loss may occur within other *C. wrightii* localities, as analyzed above. If climate change leads to future drought, additional dewatering and reduction of *C. wrightii* habitat may occur.

Although the information available on climate change indicates that New Mexico will be impacted (New Mexico Climate Change Advisory Group 2006, p. 1), there is no information specific to the effects of climate change on Wright's marsh thistle or its habitat. Reliable predictive models have not been developed for use at the local scale (i.e., the eight occupied localities), and there is little certainty regarding the timing and magnitude of the resulting impacts. For example, the vulnerability of *C. wrightii* habitats to a drying climate depends, in large part, on the sources of their water supply. The sources of water to *C. wrightii* habitats are precipitation, surface water, and groundwater. Habitats that are sustained mainly by precipitation are the most likely to be affected in a drying climate. Alternatively, localities that are supplied primarily by groundwater will likely have the greatest resistance to climate change due to water stored in aquifers (Poff et al. 2002, pp. 18-19). However, based on predictions of human population growth in the region increasing the demand for groundwater, and on projections made by the IPCC, we consider climate change to be a potential exacerbating factor, worsening the impacts of other known threats. These threats include habitat degradation from prolonged periods of drought and increased temperature, and the allocation of water for use by the human population and agriculture as well as a number of potential confounding effects.

In summary, we do not have evidence indicating that climate change is currently a factor affecting *C. wrightii*'s existence, because the information available on the subject is insufficiently specific to the species or the possible current or future effects of climate change on the sources of their water supply. However, we consider climate change to be a potential exacerbating factor and, if the drought continues, will likely be a threat in the future to the plant given it is a wetland obligate. We will continue to evaluate new information on the subject as it becomes available.

## Hybridization

Wright's marsh thistle is capable of crossbreeding with other native *Cirsium* species to produce hybrid offspring (Correll and Johnston 1979, p. 1719; Worthington 2002, entire; NMRPTC 2009, p. 2). For example, *Cirsium* species observed at Rattlesnake Springs (Carlsbad Caverns National Park), New Mexico, show characteristics that are intermediate between *C. wrightii* and *C. texanum* (NMRPTC 2009, p. 2). This *Cirsium* population blooms in May rather than in August through October, as is typical of *C. wrightii*. Wright's marsh thistle sometimes occurs with the threatened *C. vinaceum* in the Sacramento Mountains, where a few hybrids between these rare taxa have been observed; however, hybrid plants are uncommon (Service 2008a, p. 13; Worthington 2002). While hybridization between *C. wrightii* and other *Cirsium* species has been observed, it is uncommon, and does not appear to be a threat to *C. wrightii*.

## Herbicide Use

Wright's marsh thistle is likely eliminated from its habitat by individuals that believe it is a noxious weed, due to its large and conspicuous size (Sivinski 1996, p. 10). At least one locality in the



Sacramento Mountains is currently susceptible to herbicide application or mowing because *C. wrightii* is found in association with an introduced weed (*Arctium minus* (burdock)) within the highway right-of-way that is frequently treated (Sivinski 1996, p. 6). Another locality of *C. wrightii* in the Sacramento Mountains is surrounded by dense stands of *Centaurea melitensis* (Malta star-thistle) that could also potentially be treated with herbicides (Sivinski 1996, p. 6). If herbicides are applied to other localities, *C. wrightii* could be impacted. For example, in June 2007, on Federal Highway 82 in Otero County, a misapplication of herbicide by the State of New Mexico Department of Transportation injured or killed *C. wrightii*, as well as the federally threatened species *C. vinaceum* and *Argemone pleiacantha* ssp. *pinnatisecta* (Sacramento prickly poppy) (Tonne 2007). Additionally, in June 2010, herbicide was applied to the highway 91 right-of-way in Santa Rosa, likely killing or injuring *C. wrightii* and *Helianthus paradoxus* (Service 2010c, p. 1).

The indirect effects of herbicide application also have the potential to affect the species. For example, in 2002, shortly after application in upland areas, heavy rains washed the common herbicide tebuthiuron into Threemile Draw, a tributary to the Black River, in the vicinity of the Blue Spring locality (NMDGF 2007, p. 24). Farmers downstream in Malaga reported damage to irrigated crops from this herbicide. It is unknown whether this affected Wright's marsh thistle, but demonstrates that indirect effects from herbicide application on upland areas may also impact riparian vegetation. After reviewing this information, we find that effects from herbicide use have the potential to impact *C. wrightii*, but are currently not known to be impacting most localities.

#### Summary of Factor E

In summary, we do not have evidence indicating that climate change is currently a factor affecting *C. wrightii*'s existence because the information available on the subject is insufficiently specific to the species or its water supply. We do not currently consider hybridization or herbicide use as threats to the species; however, these may become threats in the future.

### **Conservation Measures Planned or Implemented :**

During 2010, surveys were funded and conducted through section 6 of the Act in Arizona. Survey locations were determined using herbaria sheets and status reports to select sites that had the highest potential habitat across much of Arizona. Even though over 100 locations were surveyed, no extant localities were found. In 2011, rosettes of the species were experimentally planted in Grant County, New Mexico. In 2012, most of the extant locations in New Mexico were surveyed through funding under section 6 of the Act.

### **Summary of Threats :**

Wright's marsh thistle faces threats from present or threatened destruction, modification, and curtailment of its habitat, primarily from natural and human-caused modifications of its habitat due to ground and surface water depletion, drought, and invasion of *P. australis* (Factor A), and from the inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms (Factor D). Wright's marsh thistle occupies relatively small areas of seeps, springs, and wetland habitat in an arid region plagued by drought

and ongoing and future water withdrawals, making climate change (Factor E) a potential future threat should the pattern of reduced available water to this area continue. The species' highly specific requirements of saturated soils with surface or subsurface water flow make it particularly vulnerable to these threats to an extent that the species may become endangered within the foreseeable future, depending primarily on how much modification or drying of its limited amount of habitat may occur. We find that *C. wrightii* is likely to become endangered throughout all or a significant portion of its range within the foreseeable future based on the threats described above.

**For species that are being removed from candidate status:**

\_\_\_\_\_ Is the removal based in whole or in part on one or more individual conservation efforts that you determined met the standards in the Policy for Evaluation of Conservation Efforts When Making Listing Decisions(PECE)?

**Recommended Conservation Measures :**

Riparian exclosures, improved enforcement of CWA regulations in Santa Rosa, and habitat restoration projects will be necessary before significant risk reduction for Wright's marsh thistle is achieved. Moreover, the key conservation measures include:

- Establish additional grazing exclosures in riparian areas on Forest Service lands, on the Lincoln National Forest to support expansion of extant populations of Wright's marsh thistle.
- Investigate the possibility of reintroductions to historically occupied habitat where natural recolonization is unlikely. Transplants of rosettes within existing localities may also assist in the expansion of occupied habitat.
- Conduct additional surveys for Wright's marsh thistle particularly springs and cienegas in southeastern New Mexico and Mexico.
- Coordinate closely with BLNWR on management of the species. For example, investigate how Wright's marsh thistle responds to changing water levels on the refuge, when soils are not continuously saturated throughout the growing season.
- Develop a conservation strategy for the species, to guide coordinated conservation efforts by multiple partners. This strategy would also include an educational component to inform private and State landowners of wetland permitting requirements when they fill or drain their lands.
- Monitor and evaluate whether insect predators are a threat to Wright's marsh thistle, particularly in Sacramento Mountains.

**Priority Table**

Magnitude	Immediacy	Taxonomy	Priority
High	Imminent	Monotypic genus	1
		Species	2
		Subspecies/Population	3
	Non-imminent	Monotypic genus	4
		Species	5
		Subspecies/Population	6
Moderate to Low	Imminent	Monotypic genus	7
		<b>Species</b>	<b>8</b>
		Subspecies/Population	9
	Non-Imminent	Monotype genus	10
		Species	11
		Subspecies/Population	12

### Rationale for Change in Listing Priority Number:

No change in listing priority number.

### Magnitude:

We consider the threats that Wright's marsh thistle faces to be moderate in magnitude because the major threats (habitat loss and degradation due to alteration of the hydrology of its rare wetland habitat), while serious and occurring rangewide, do not collectively rise to the level of high magnitude, relative to other species. The species occurs only in areas that are water-saturated and populations have a high potential for extirpation when habitat dries due to ground and surface water depletion, draining of wetlands, or drought.

### Imminence :

We consider all of the threats to be imminent because we have factual information that the threats are identifiable and that the species is currently facing them in many portions of its range. Long-term drought, in combination with ground and surface water withdrawal, pose a current and future threat to Wright's marsh thistle and its habitat. These actual, identifiable threats are covered in greater detail in Factors A and D of this assessment. All of the threats are ongoing and therefore imminent. In addition to their current existence, we expect these threats to continue and likely intensify in the foreseeable future.

  Yes   Have you promptly reviewed all of the information received regarding the species for the purpose of determination whether emergency listing is needed?

## Emergency Listing Review

  No   Is Emergency Listing Warranted?

There are eight general localities of Wright's marsh thistle extant within New Mexico. Additional historical populations have been extirpated, including at least two larger and two smaller populations in New Mexico, and there are no known extant populations in Arizona. However, the 2012 surveys estimated that about 110 ac (45 ha) are occupied by 33,000 to 42,000 individuals of *C. wrightii*. The population at BLNWR is likely the most robust, with 14,000 to 18,000 individuals. Santa Rosa contains mostly scattered localities throughout four sections of land, and some of these have been extirpated recently. The population along Tularosa Creek has undergone a significant reduction since 1995 and contains only four individuals. The remaining populations in the Sacramento Mountains are all small, containing from two to perhaps several hundred individuals. The populations at Blue Spring and Alamosa Springs were recently discovered. There have been no subsequent surveys at Blue Spring to determine whether this population is stable or declining. Alternatively, in 2012, the population at Alamosa Springs was estimated at 900 flowering individuals (Sivinski 2012, p. 9). We will continue to monitor the threats to *C. wrightii* and the species' status on an annual basis, and should the magnitude or the imminence of the threats change, we will re-visit our assessment.

### Description of Monitoring:

Monitoring in New Mexico has been both intensive and extensive (please see information reviewed above under the Current Range/Distribution section, above). In 2010, extensive surveys in Arizona were conducted, but no individuals were detected (Baker 2011, entire). Surveys were also conducted in 2012 throughout most of the sites in New Mexico (Sivinski 2012, entire). The 2012 survey information is incorporated throughout this assessment.

**Indicate which State(s) (within the range of the species) provided information or comments on the species or latest species assessment:**

Arizona, New Mexico

**Indicate which State(s) did not provide any information or comment:**

none

### State Coordination:

The State of New Mexico lists Wright's marsh thistle as endangered under the New Mexico Endangered Plant Species Act (9-10-10 NMSA). As such, most of the occupied localities in New Mexico were surveyed during 2012 (Sivinski 2012, entire). The State of Arizona conducted surveys in 2010. This information is included in the assessment.

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### **Approval/Concurrence:**

Lead Regions must obtain written concurrence from all other Regions within the range of the species before recommending changes, including elevations or removals from candidate status and listing priority changes; the Regional Director must approve all such recommendations. The Director must concur on all resubmitted 12-month petition findings, additions or removal of species from candidate status, and listing priority changes.

Approve:



06/12/2015

Date

Concur:



12/15/2015

Date

Did not concur:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

Director's Remarks: